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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 004506

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR PREL SNAR CO GOV

SUBJECT: U/S GROSSMAN MEETS WITH VICE-PRESIDENT SANTOS

REF: A. BOGOTA 04176

1B. BOGOTA 04278

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) On April 29, U/S Grossman met Vice-President Santos. Grossman said that the USG supports Plan Patriota, and praised the GOC's accomplishments in combating narcotics and terrorism. The U/S stressed that the USG will insist on maintaining extradition as an effective law enforcement tool, and cautioned that much still needs to be done to improve the human rights situation. End Summary.

Pressing Forward with Security Strategy

12. (C) U/S Grossman lauded GOC success combating narcoterrorism, and expressed USG support for Plan Patriota and the consolidation of Plan Colombia. The U/S thanked the GOC for assistance in the search for the American hostages, and said Plan Patriota could bring us even closer to locating them. GOC public security forces must focus on: (1) improving cooperation between the military and the police; and (2) severing forever ties between the public security forces and the paramilitaries by imposing strict discipline. The Ambassador highlighted Vice Admiral Soto's response to the "Gloria" narcotics incident as an example of quick, forceful action.

13. (C) Santos said the GOC agreed with both recommendations. Although military-police cooperation in the field has been good, cooperation at the national level needs improvement. Santos added that the paramilitaries pose a particular challenge, given their strong support in certain communities. However, he is seeing a decline in support by sectors that have traditionally supported paramilitary groups; more importantly, military and police leaders have also noted this.

14. (C) Grossman asked about the impact of increased public security presence, and noted the high level of desertions by illegal armed groups. Santos agreed the desertion results were impressive. He does not expect the same results this year, however, since those remaining in the terrorist organizations are more likely to be hardcore members. Santos expressed surprise that the FARC had not put up more of a fight defending territory. Perhaps the GOC had overestimated the FARC's strength. Alternatively, perhaps the FARC mistakenly expect the GOC to withdraw from FARC areas and, more fundamentally, are waiting out Uribe's term. Santos said the FARC must be concerned about Uribe's possible re-election, since they lack the resources to last eight years of Uribe. Capture of another key FARC leader could start splintering the group.

15. (C) Santos asked for an update on FARC leader "Sonia's" extradition. He also requested additional U.S. support for the Colombian Navy (COLNAV), as river operations will be crucial in Plan Patriota. The Ambassador said "Sonia's" extradition is proceeding. He also noted that her capture would not have been possible when he arrived last August; the improvements in the military's ability to conduct small, specialized operations has improved dramatically. The Ambassador added that U.S. assistance to COLNAV increased this year, and the Embassy has asked for additional funds for it the next two fiscal years.

16. (C) Grossman asked about the possibility of peace negotiations with the ELN. Santos responded that there has been no progress either in the GOC or the Catholic Church tracks. The ELN is weak and lacks leadership. Moreover, its cumbersome decision-making process inhibits consensus. The Ambassador added that some believe the ELN's window of opportunity (when they were weak enough to want peace, but strong enough to be able to negotiate) has closed.

17. (C) Santos was puzzled why the price of cocaine has not increased, despite the record-levels of aerial and manual eradication. Grossman observed that overall coca production went down in the Andean region by 15 percent. The Ambassador added that eradication is working: during 2002-3, 270 tons of

cocaine was destroyed; however, we lack the knowledge of inventory and markets that would allow us to accurately gauge the impact.

The Future of the Paramilitary Peace Process

18. (C) Grossman expressed his appreciation for President Uribe's April 27 statement on the paramilitary peace process (ref B). He stressed that extradition cannot be a bargaining chip in negotiations and asked whether the paramilitaries would now be confronted on the battlefield.

19. (C) In response, Santos said:

-- As Uribe has said, this is the paramilitaries' last chance to escape military confrontation. AUC leader Carlos Castano had a moderating influence, and his removal means hardliners are solely in control of the negotiating process (ref A). If the paramilitaries do not want to negotiate, the military will need to challenge them on the battlefield. The GOC is concerned that its public security forces are not capable of combating the guerrillas and the paramilitaries simultaneously. Santos added that the paramilitaries are more politically savvy than the FARC and enjoy greater popular support than the guerrillas.

-- Although extradition is off the negotiating table, there might be a need in the future for the GOC to offer a way out to those who have demonstrated their commitment to peace and renunciation of crime. Grossman said that there should not be any hint that this might be a bargaining chip; Santos agreed.

10. (C) The Ambassador asked about paramilitary threats against the President. Santos said there have been instances of joint FARC-paramilitary terrorism, and this could grow over the next year. Santos thanked the USG for assistance with Uribe's protective security.

Increase Focus on Human Rights

11. (C) Grossman said that the State Department's human rights certification process was much more controversial this year. Critics question accountability in the Prosecutor General's Office ("Fiscalia"), ties between paramilitaries and public security forces, and large-scale detentions. The Ambassador noted the General Del Rio case. The GOC must deal with these issues. Grossman said that the MOD's recent statement about registering NGOs in Choco (septel) had raised concerns among human rights groups. Santos assured Grossman that the GOC will continue working hard to improve Colombia's human rights situation.

12. (C) The Ambassador expressed concern with the level of corruption and paramilitary collusion within the Prosecutor General's Office, and called for the establishment of an effective anti-corruption unit. Santos responded that he supports Prosecutor General ("Fiscal") Osorio's recent dismissals of corrupt officials. He expressed confidence that Osorio will continue cleaning up the Prosecutor General's Office, especially with the support of his exceptional deputy. He also lauded the Prosecutor General Office's Human Rights Unit, and noted concern for the safety of the unit's prosecutors due to their aggressive investigations.

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